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Manning, William Thomas

Theodore Roosevelt

[New York]

[1919]

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THEODORE ROOSEVELT

An Address

Delivered in

Trinity Church, New York

By the Rector

WILLIAM T. MANNING

At the Memorial Service

Held under the auspices

of the

AMERICAN DEFENSE SOCIETY

Sunday, February 9th, 1919

26 Feb. 1920 - C.R.W.

America is mourning one of her greatest sons. All over the land to-day our people are remembering before God the name of Theodore Roosevelt.

And this memorial service in Trinity Church has special significance because it is held under the auspices of the American Defense Society, of which he was Honorary President; and to which he addressed his last public message, which you have just heard read.

We can scarcely believe that he is no longer with us. It seems impossible to think of America without him.

In 1852, Motley, while abroad received news of the death of Daniel Webster. Writing to his father he said: "As for thinking of America without Webster, it seems like thinking of her without Niagara, or the Mississippi."

It is so that men feel at the death of Theodore Roosevelt. He seemed like one of the elemental forces of our life. In every situation, and on every question, his attitude was to be considered, and was a vital factor.

For nearly a quarter of a century he was the first citizen of our Republic. And he was more than this. He was one of the commanding figures of the world; a force felt by men everywhere.

In the hearts and minds of our people, Theodore Roosevelt holds a great and abiding place. More than any other American since Abraham Lincoln he embodied the spirit, and the ideals of our land. There are few mothers in America who would not wish their sons to have the spirit of Theodore Roosevelt.

His powers and attainments were extraordinarily varied. He found time to excel in widely differing pursuits. His energy and versatility were almost beyond belief. He was a ranchman, a writer, a hunter, an explorer, a naturalist, a soldier, a historian. But to him these were all minor occupations. His supreme interest was in the welfare of his country and in whatever had to do with this. It is in relation to our National life that we all think of him, as President, as citizen, and as a man.

His services after the expiration of his term as President were so great that they have almost obscured those which he rendered as our Chief Executive. It is nevertheless a fact that the administration of President Roosevelt was one of the most crucially important and epoch marking chapters in our history.

He was the first President to recognize the responsibility of the Government in regard to social conditions. He entered the White House at a time when things almost impossible, and certain to arouse bitter misunderstanding and opposition, needed to be done, and in great measure he succeeded in accomplishing them. He stirred the conscience of the country and gave our business and industrial life a new standard. There was in him no unworthy pandering to a particular class of men. He was as fearless in his dealings with labor as with capital. He had no ignorant antagonism to Big Business as such, but he was as intolerant of wrong doing by Big Business as he was of the crimes plotted or committed by the I. W. W. or other anarchistic organizations.

If our country is now in condition to resist the poison of Bolshevism we owe this, in large measure, to Theodore Roosevelt, for it was he who made the fight, at the critical time, and gave us the new spirit that we needed.

As a citizen Theodore Roosevelt set a high standard indeed. One of our worst national sins is our disregard of civic obligation, our disposition to let Government take care of itself without any serious effort on our part. With Theodore Roosevelt duty and service to the country stood always first. He gave us a most striking example of a man devoting his whole powers to the state. His vigorous character greatly affected the tone of our political life. He proved the falsity of the maxim that an honest man cannot be in politics. He inspired, and will continue to inspire, our young men with ambition for service; for his career is proof that a man who is fearless, honest and true to the highest ideals can win success in public life.

As a man, we all know well what his qualities were. We cannot hear his name without thinking of his courage, his sincerity of purpose, his strong conviction, his deep love for the right and his unflinching advocacy of it. He made mistakes, like other men, but he always upheld the right as he saw it, and it was this which gave the people their great confidence in him.

There are many good people in this world who want the good to prevail, but who are unwilling to do anything which will cause friction, or which will bring them into conflict with evil. Theodore Roosevelt was not of this class. He knew that the good cannot be made to prevail by that method. He was ready always to withstand what he believed to be evil, and to uphold what he believed to be good. He did not stop to think whether the cause was popular. No thought of the consequences to himself or to his personal interests seemed to occur to him. If the thing was right it was to be advocated; and he had absolute confidence that if it were fully presented to them the people would see that it was right. He struck hard blows, but he harbored no petty spites nor mean resentments. He aroused strong opposition and fierce criticism as every leader must at times, but in amazing degree he won the admiration, the respect, the affection even of those who most strongly opposed him. It was said sometimes that he was inconsistent. And this was true. But his inconsistency was that of every man who thinks and grows and lives. Theodore Roosevelt did not stand still. He grew and developed in fellowship with the world and with his time, and it was this that made him always a leader. But he advanced in accordance with sound and definite principles.

The outstanding note of his life was his straightforward sincerity. He was possessed by an astonishing spirit of candor. For him nothing else but open diplomacy and full publicity were possible. There was never anything uncertain or obscure about the words that he used. When he spoke, men were in no doubt as to what he meant to say. No phrase of his needed to be interpreted to make its meaning clear. He never expected others to follow him without knowing where he was leading. Men might disagree with him but they knew always where he stood, and on which side he was. He took his fellow citizens absolutely into his confidence, and it was for this, among other things that they so trusted and loved him.

And through all his life there ran the note of strong, simple religious conviction. This was the basis of his unfailing hopefulness and courage. His faith in God was as robust and real as his faith in men. We honor him as a great American, a true man, a sincere and unashamed Christian.

Long and brilliant as was his career in public office, it was his privilege to wield his greatest influence, and render his noblest service as a private citizen, and in the latest years of his life.

The name of Theodore Roosevelt will stand forever associated with the entrance of America into the world war.

It was his voice far more than any other, which roused the soul of our country and brought us to ourselves before it was too late. It was his fearless witness which compelled our people to see the truth and to meet their responsibility.

In the day when America stood neutral before the greatest moral crisis in history, when the pacifist spirit was dominant, when the soul of our nation seemed to be

dulled and deadened, when men in highest place were saying that this was Europe's war, that its issues did not concern us, that the war spirit among us was being fomented by the munition makers, Theodore Roosevelt's voice sounded the call to honor and to duty. His strong championship of right urged us to the course which after two and a half years of hesitation, we took at last.

It was he who led in the demand that there should be no terms with Germany but unconditional surrender.

And when the fighting was ended, it was his voice which was again lifted up for a just and righteous settlement, and against a soft and immoral peace.

No one of open mind will question the great part played by Theodore Roosevelt in the world battle for righteousness and freedom. His unmatched service during this period will stand clear in the pages of history.

It was his fervent desire to have part in the struggle at the front. This opportunity was denied him but he gave that which was dearer to him than his own life. He sent four sons into the fighting line, all to prove themselves worthy of him, and of their country—one of them never to return.

His unceasing labors during the war, and the shock of his son Quentin's death no doubt hastened his end. His loss to the country is an irreparable one. It seems as though he could not be spared at this time. A mighty leader has fallen. But as Americans it is our part to carry on.

This is a day when many are confused in mind, and are giving their support to dangerous and disruptive influences without realizing what they are doing.

It is a day when many, both men and women, are guided by emotion rather than by well thought out principle and clear judgment. Let us stand against that pacifist spirit which seems to see little difference between truth and falsehood, between honor and dishonor, between the wronged and the wrong doer. Let us stand for the ideal of American freedom and individual liberty and against those influences which are tending to weaken or destroy it. Let us stand for a Government owned and controlled and run by the people, and not for a people owned body and soul, and run by the Government. Let us stand for the Constitution of the United States and against all, no matter how good their intentions, who are using their influence to impair it, or to create distrust in it, or to overthrow it. So shall we best do our part as Americans. And so shall we best honor the name and memory of Theodore Roosevelt.

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